

Hidden Dangers

METH

Labs

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
What Is A Clandestine Drug Laboratory.....	2
Indicators That A Clan Lab May Exist	3
Where Are Clan Labs Located.....	4
What To Do If You Suspect A Clan Lab	5
Resources	7
Acknowledgments	8

Introduction

This publication serves as a resource tool for those working in the community environment. Illegal drug manufacturing laboratories present a very real danger to the public. This publication provides insight on how you can recognize possible illegal drug labs and the steps you can take to protect yourself.

Anyone working in the community may come across a drug lab. You may work for a utility company, social services, animal control or in another occupation which takes you into the community. Emergency personnel, in particular, should be cautious when responding to fires, explosions, injuries and reports of chemical smells of an unknown origin.

What Is A Clandestine Drug Laboratory?

The clandestine drug laboratory, also known as a *clan lab* or meth lab, is a mini-chemical lab designed for one purpose: to make illegal drugs secretly, quickly and cheaply.

Clan labs are used to produce Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). Gamma hydroxy butyrate (GHB), synthetic heroin and other drugs. Most illegal drug labs produce methamphetamine, commonly called *meth*, *speed*, crank, crystal, ice and other street names. Meth can be smoked, ingested or injected by users.

Methamphetamine itself is dangerous, but the labs used to produce the drug are equally dangerous and can be located in any neighborhood. Toxic chemicals, explosions, fires, booby traps and armed criminals often go hand-in-hand with meth labs. These labs are a recipe for disaster to people who inadvertently stumble onto a lab or live near one.

High concentrations of toxic fumes, flammable materials and explosive chemicals in these labs create an extremely dangerous environment. Explosion and fire are the most common hazards. Meth labs always have a mixture of volatile chemicals such as ether, phosphorous and flammable solvents.

Actions such as knocking over the wrong container, having a lit cigarette or switching on electrical equipment may be enough to cause an explosion.

Contact with the chemicals themselves is extremely hazardous. Whether in their raw form or after they've been "cooked" into finished drugs, touching these chemicals or just breathing their fumes can cause sickness, permanent injury and even, death. Some law enforcement officers have suffered serious injuries such as a collapsed lung, pneumonia and chemical bronchitis from even small exposures to fumes from meth labs.

Booby traps are occasionally used by the cooks. These traps can be triggered by any normal movement, such as opening a door or flipping on a switch. Common booby traps include:

- ▶ Exterior/interior trip wires designed to set off alarms.
- ▶ Exterior/interior trip wires designed to set off explosive or toxic chemical devices.
- ▶ Light switches, refrigerators, VCRs or other electrical appliances wired to explosive devices.

Indicators That A Clan Lab May Exist?

In both rural and urban areas, anyone can unexpectedly come across a clandestine laboratory. Signs of a possible lab include:

- ▶ Strong or unusual chemical odors. Some people have described the odors as being similar to dirty socks or cat urine.
- ▶ Laboratory equipment (glass tubes, beakers, Bunsen burners, funnels).
- ▶ Evidence of large quantities of cold medication or non-prescription weight loss products. There may be a large number of discarded blister packages or plastic bottles with the bottoms cut out.
- ▶ Chemical cans or drums in the front or backyard (these containers often

have the labels marked or painted over).

- ▶ People going outside the building only long enough to smoke, especially at motels or during bad weather.
- ▶ Automobile or foot traffic at all hours of the day or night.
- ▶ Fortifications on houses or outbuildings, such as heavily barred windows or doors, etc.
- ▶ New high fences with no visible livestock or animals.
- ▶ Orange-brown or rust colored stains on walls, floors, counter tops, bathtubs and sinks.

Where are Clan Labs Located?

Clan labs are often found in:

- ▶ Rural rentals with absentee landlords (homes, barns, mobile homes or outbuildings).
- ▶ Apartments.
- ▶ Hotels and motels.
- ▶ Trailers and motor homes.
- ▶ Houseboats.
- ▶ Mini-storage units. These are used to store chemicals, drugs, lab equipment and weapons.
- ▶ Car trunks.

Clan labs may be portable and can be quickly disassembled and moved to a new location.

A second hazard posed by meth labs exists when chemicals and equipment are discarded along highways, in drainage systems, in earthen pits or in public waterways. Cookers often dump toxic waste or lab equipment anywhere. They show no regard for the extreme danger and hazards to people, property or the environment.

What To Do If You Suspect A Clan Lab

1. LEAVE THE AREA AT ONCE.

Extensive training and protective gear are required before entering a clan lab. Most law enforcement agencies have special narcotics teams consisting of toxic waste specialists and trained law enforcement officers. Seizing clan labs is their job, let them do it. Stay at least 500 feet away from any suspected clandestine laboratory.

2. CONTACT LAW ENFORCEMENT IMMEDIATELY

Call **911** if you think you've been exposed to toxic chemical, or if you believe there is an immediate risk of fire or explosion. Provide a detailed description of what you have observed that made you think a lab may be present.

3. NOTIFY OTHERS WHO MAY BE IN IMMEDIATE DANGER.

If you believe there is an immediate danger, notify neighbors and others in the area near the suspected lab. Do not confront any suspected criminals. Let law enforcement handle all investigations.

Remember:

Be alert.

Be aware.

Be careful.

Be observant

Your knowledge and quick action can help in closing down a lab and preventing serious injury or death to yourself and others. But remember, clan labs are toxic time bombs. Meth labs often cause fires, explosions and injuries.

Never investigate a suspect clan lab. Call local law enforcement or the interagency drug task force in your area.

For further information visit:
www.stopdrugs.org.

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(More on following page.)

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**Never investigate a suspected clan lab.
Call local law enforcement of the
interagency drug task force in your area.**

For further information, visit:
www.stopdrugs.org

Resources

If you suspect the presence of a methamphetamine lab, contact your local law enforcement agency or the nearest Bureau of Narcotic enforcement regional office. The Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement regional office may be contacted at the following:

Fresno Regional Office
(559) 445-5451

Los Angeles Regional Office
(323) 869-6800

Orange Regional Office
(714) 558-4183

Redding Regional Office
(530) 224-4750

Riverside Regional Office
(909) 782-4313

Sacramento Regional Office
(916) 464-2030

San Diego Regional Office
(858) 268-5300

San Francisco Regional Office
(415) 351-3373

San Jose Regional Office
(408) 452-7360

Additional information on
Methamphetamine Abuse and
Addiction:

**California Department of Alcohol
and Drug Programs**
(800) 879-2772
www.adp.ca.gov

**National Clearinghouse for Alcohol
and Drug Abuse Information**
(800) 729-6686
www.health.org

**National Institute on Drug Abuse
(NIDA)**
(301) 443-1124
www.NIDA.nih.gov

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